

Executive Summary

For the reporting year, please provide a summary of your State's (1) accomplishments, (2) lessons learned, (3) challenges, and (4) strategies you will implement to address those challenges.

Year 2 of Minnesota's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant has been one of great strides in the implementation of an aggressive early childhood reform agenda with a goal to improve outcomes for children through increased access to high quality services birth to grade three.

Minnesota has prioritized its work into the components of a successful state system: High Quality, Accountable Programs; Increased Access to High Quality; Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children; Great Early Childhood Workforce; and Measuring Outcomes and Progress. Below are highlights of 2013 accomplishments.

Components 1: High Quality, Accountable Programs

Minnesota Parent Aware is Minnesota's voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement System for early care and education programs.

Key Accomplishments

- Completed a planned review and revision of Parent Aware TQRIS standards and indicators, making modest changes to some standards and indicators to improve consistency and clarity in rating programs as we prepare for a more extensive review and revision of indicators in 2015.
- Continued steady expansion of Parent Aware, extending the TQIRS into additional counties for non-accredited child care programs, enabling programs funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and charter schools with pre-kindergarten programs to seek an accelerated rating and strengthening partnerships with many stakeholders and supporters to recruit all types of programs into either the full rating or accelerated rating pathway.
- Exceeded targets for program participation in Parent Aware across almost every program type, rating 1,322 programs as of December, 2013 or 89 percent of our overall target of 1,491 for Year 2 of the grant.
- Significant increases in access for children with high needs to high quality programs were achieved with targets exceeded for children served across every type of program.
- Aggressively marketed Parent Aware to families through a unique public-private partnership with Parent Aware for School Readiness. Media ads resulted in significant increases in use of on-line ratings information and growing awareness of Parent Aware as an important tool for selecting high quality early care and education.
- Introduced new incentives for Parent Aware program participation that support access for young children to high quality early childhood programs. A new Child Care Assistance Program policy makes 3 and 4 Star Rated child care programs eligible for higher rates and expansion of Early Learning Scholarships to children using Parent Aware-participating programs has spurred stronger program interest in our TQIRS.
- Requests for Proposals to provide Child Care Health Consultation were posted for each Transformation Zone, and three grants were awarded for the four Transformation Zones. (One grantee serves two zones.)
- The MDH Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC) provided training to the grantees using curriculum developed by the National Training Institute for Child Care Health Consultants, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Gillings School of Public Health. The CCHC training was opened to participation by other public health agencies and individual practitioners who had interest in providing Child Care Health Consultant services. Nine public health nurses (7 grantees and 2 public health nurses serving outside the Transformation Zones) completed the training. Participants reported that the training materials and tools were very informative to their work in early childhood settings.

- Grantees have been engaged in program development for the Transformation Zones which has included training of the CCHC's, meetings with local child care providers, quality coaches, and child care organizations. Outreach and CCHC service to individual providers has been initiated.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Lagging participation of non-accredited child care programs - both child care centers and family child care providers - remains a critical challenge and requires a multi-pronged approach to making progress: clear, strong and consistent messaging to programs; expanded recruitment efforts that promote new incentives and build on current and new partnerships with local and state leadership; and strategic use of administrative and evaluation data are priorities for 2014.
- Child care health consultation has been recognized as a valuable service and requested by providers outside the Transformation Zones. The challenges to providing CCHC services outside the Transformation Zones include limited resource availability and funding. CCHC services are not readily available in many parts of the state. Funded CCHC services are only available in the Transformation Zones through the RTT-ELC grant.
- Additional requests for CCHC training have been received. Given limited funding, the format by which future trainings might be offered is being explored.

Component 2: Increased Access to High Quality

Minnesota's Access Strategies include two approaches to increase children with high needs' access to high quality early childhood education and care. These two strategies are Early Learning Scholarships provided to families to financially support access to a program participating in Parent Aware and Title I PreK Incentive grants to school districts that contribute Title I funds to early childhood programming.

Key Accomplishments

- Each Transformation Zones continued implementing the Early Learning Scholarships in their local community. Across the four Transformation Zones, 809 Scholarships were awarded in the first year of implementation to increase access to high quality early education and care programs.
- SRI International, the evaluation contractor, conducted the first year of a multi-year evaluation. In interviews conducted by SRI in each of the Transformation Zones, key stakeholders described positive examples of how scholarships increased access to high quality programs, increased hours and continuity of care for children.
- Minnesota has increased the number of districts shifting Title I funds to early childhood from six districts in the first year of the grant to 23 in the second year through RTT-ELC funded Title I PreK Incentive grants. School districts in each of the Transformation Zones participated in the Title I PreK Incentive grant opportunity for the 2013-2014 school year. Additionally, Minnesota was able to expand the grant opportunity to thirteen new districts classified as focus school under Minnesota's ESEA waiver plan.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- The Title I PreK Incentives opportunity has highlights the need to educate school districts more on the value of early childhood education and how the systems (child care, Head Start, school-based) in the state are organized.
- Schools have faced multiple challenges which have made accessing the Title I PreK Incentives difficult, these include an unstable school funding environment (education payments delayed, sequestration, recession); time lines for budgeting requires new funds to be known early in the year; and the difficulty for smaller districts to reallocate Title I when it represents a large percentage of their budget.
- To address some of these challenges, Minnesota has moved the annual grant opportunity to earlier in the year to align with school budgeting process and offered Planning and Preparation Title I PreK Incentive grants offered in the White Earth Transformation

Zone to improve the opportunity for these districts to participate in the grant.

- In interviews conducted by SRI in each of the Transformation Zones, the key challenges identified were transportation issues for families and difficulty with the initial start-up process.

Component 3: Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

Minnesota is currently revising the Language, Literacy and Communication and the Social and Emotional domains of Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (Early Childhood Indicators of Progress; ECIPs). Additionally, Minnesota is working to develop a comprehensive system that supports early childhood professionals in the assessment and screening of individual children, environments and programs.

Key Accomplishments

- Two Early Learning Standards Revision Committees were created to review the current Early Learning Standards in each of the two domains, ensure revisions were grounded in current and commonly accepted research on brain development, curriculum, child learning, curriculum, and provide recommendations for revisions. Each committee held 10 meetings, and the first draft of revisions was sent out to over 20 state experts for input.
- The Comprehensive Assessment System Workgroup has adopted three over arching priorities for implementation (a) kindergarten entry assessment alignment with PreK-3 measures, (b) professional development initiatives that will embed aligned assessment definitions into new and existing PD on assessment and create quality assessment user groups and (c) a pre-PD online needs assessment designed to aid early care and education providers in choosing an appropriate assessment tool based on their needs.
- The Minnesota Interagency Developmental Screening Task Force expanded its focus to serve as an advisory group for the online screening initiative.
- Currently in the process of developing an implementation and training plan for the online screening pilot based on the analysis that was conducted during the first reporting period.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- There is a lack of understanding by the Early Childhood field about what the Early Learning Standards are and how they can be used by many people in state.
- Using a broad, diverse statewide group for the committees, while a challenge, seems to be an effective method for establishing a cohort of people that have an appreciation of standards and are invested in the use of the standards.
- During the next round of domain review, we will need to attract more content experts to participate in the committees while maintaining our commitment to keeping the committees diverse and crossing program type.
- It is imperative to create a common language between early childhood educators and K-12 regarding assessment.

Component 4: Great Early Childhood Workforce

Minnesota is currently revising its Workforce Knowledge and Competencies Framework and ensuring professional development opportunities are aligned and accessible to Early Childhood Educators.

Key Accomplishments

- The advisory group for the preschool version of the Knowledge and Competency Framework has met and completed a draft of the Framework which has been reviewed by national experts.
- The advisory group for the infant and toddler version of the Knowledge and Competency Framework will complete its version of the Framework in February.
- The advisory group for the family child care version of the Knowledge and Competency

Framework began its draft version of the Framework in January 2014.

- Leadership of various membership associations have been contacted to inform and begin conversation about distribution, implementation and use of the Knowledge and Competency Framework documents when completed in summer of 2014.
- Progress toward completion of new or revised credentials and training aligned with Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework and with our Parent Aware TQIRS add to the array of professional development options for Early Childhood Educators.
- There has been a steady increase in the total number of Early Childhood Educators credentialed by Institutions of Higher Education or training providers offering credentials and training aligned with our Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework.
- In response to an increasingly diverse population of young children, a new trainer learning community is increasing knowledge and skills of trainers in four language communities - Hmong, Oromo, Somali and Spanish -- so that child care providers from these communities can find training that meets their needs.
- Increased resources in the form of scholarships and low-cost training have enabled child care providers and other Early Childhood Educators to access more training and education opportunities.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Timelines for completion of the Knowledge and Competency Framework were adjusted to accommodate the decision made to have different versions for each infant and toddler; preschool; and family child care.
- Having the infant toddler advisory group refine/edit the work of the preschool group has been value added. It has created an opportunity for a second set of stakeholders to offer critical feedback.
- Building relationships with people in membership associations enhances the implementation of the Framework by identifying champions.
- As Minnesota moves toward completion of a revised Workforce Knowledge and Competency Framework, system coordination issues between our non-credit-based training systems and Higher Education systems are becoming clearer, setting the stage for identifying priorities and defining decision-making processes through the remainder of the grant.

Component 5: Measuring Outcomes and Progress

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) will enhance the state's ability to answer broad and meaningful questions jointly developed about outcomes for Minnesota's young children. This builds on the progress to develop robust student-level data over time that can track K-12 student outcomes in college and career. Additionally, Minnesota is revising its School Readiness Study in order to ensure the data provides a statewide picture of children's learning and development at Kindergarten entrance, and provide schools and teachers with information to improve instruction and services in the early elementary years.

Key Accomplishments

- Fall 2013 MDE piloted the first phase of the KEA. Schools were invited to participate in the voluntary study using a tool of their choice. A contractor has been hired to provide analysis of the 2013 pilot data and will provide recommendations for the 2014 phase two pilot.
- ECLDS Governance has been established, which includes cross membership from the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System staff.
- Policy research questions and corresponding data elements are being identified by the Research and Data Committee for the ECLDS.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

- There are many stakeholders interested in the new direction Minnesota is moving with the KEA and the ECLDS. These two efforts represent significant change to past practices

and the state is working towards a clear communications strategy for internal and external partners to gain buy-in for the kindergarten entry assessment pilot and the ECLDS.

Looking Ahead:

- Beginning January 1, 2014, the Parent Aware full rating is now available in 45 out of 87 counties for non-accredited child care programs seeking a full rating.
- There are a few counties and private practitioners that provide child care health consultation service independently across the state. In an effort to promote high quality standards of care for health and safety of children, families and staff across RTT-ELC activities and other similar efforts in the state, the MDH CCHC is developing a communication plan and networking strategies for CCHC's in the state.
- The Minnesota Evaluation of Access Strategies will begin to collect child outcome data for the Early Learning Scholarships in the fall of 2014.
- The Early Learning Standards will be circulated for public input in the spring of 2014, and finalized later this year. Input from cultural and ethnic groups will be sought through a specific meeting scheduled called Reflecting Minnesota Expert group (RME).
- The second phase of the KEA pilot will continue with a menu of assessment tools determined to be aligned with Minnesota's early learning and kindergarten standards. Phase two, being implemented fall 2014, will examine concurrent validity among the menu of tools, paying particular attention to the items with established linkages to the standards.
- Data sharing agreements between the three participating state agencies are expected to be finalized by spring 2014 and data will begin to populate the early childhood longitudinal data system. Then file transfer protocols for receipt of external data from participating agencies will be employed shortly after.